

Preface

Reconnecting the City and the River

The Mississippi River has been relatively isolated from downtown Saint Paul since the 19th century, when its role as an industrial and transportation corridor caused the city to treat the river as a “back door.” The recent retreat of the “industrial glacier” has revealed a vast terrain of opportunity in the river valley. Like cities throughout North America, this community has begun to recognize the river as a well-spring of community pride, identity and vitality.

Over the last century, transportation routes and industrial uses have isolated the Mississippi River from the downtown and adjacent neighborhoods.



As the 20th century draws to a close, the futures of Saint Paul's urban core and the adjacent Mississippi River Corridor are inextricably linked. The stage is set for Saint Paul to redefine its relationship with the river and, in so doing, to

redefine itself and its future role in the Twin Cities metropolitan region.

The *Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework* is not just a riverfront plan, nor is it just a downtown plan. It is about a reconnection of the city and river as profound and far-reaching as the industrialization of the river in the last century. In responding to this opportunity, Saint Paul, like numerous other waterfront cities, will renew and redefine itself for the next century.

Anticipating living, working and recreation in close proximity to the river, the Development Framework invites people to experience the Mississippi.



The Mississippi should be seen as flowing through, instead of adjacent to, the downtown.



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The Development Framework is based on an implicit understanding that quality of life – the ability of a city to effectively balance economy, environment and society – provides a primary competitive advantage in an increasingly globalized world. An important body of evidence suggests that the health of the local economy is intricately linked to the health and attractiveness of the natural and built environment, and the social fabric. A physically appealing and vital downtown environment will enable Saint Paul to effectively target particular market niches: people who are seeking a more urban lifestyle, high value-added companies that thrive in an urban setting, high-profile conventions and visitors. These bring an increase in outside dollars into the city and, in turn, will support a greater variety and number of supporting businesses.

The Framework does not advocate restoring the vitality of the downtown at the expense of Saint Paul's neighborhoods. The strength of the Capital City has always been in the health of its neighborhoods. An unhealthy urban core drains the city and creates significant property tax burdens for individual homeowners. With this Framework comes the opportunity for the City to reposition itself in a way that will pump new wealth and strength into the community by engaging the private and public sectors in the revitalization of the downtown waterfront core.

Some strategic investment of public resources will be required to create confidence in the downtown core and riverfront, and act as a catalyst to private investment. An important role of the Framework is to set the ground rules for this strategic reinvestment. Building upon Saint Paul's unique amenities and existing strengths – natural, social, cultural, historic, architectural, and economic – the Framework establishes a compelling vision that can foster investor confidence and provide broad direction for mutually supportive and integrated private, public and community projects.

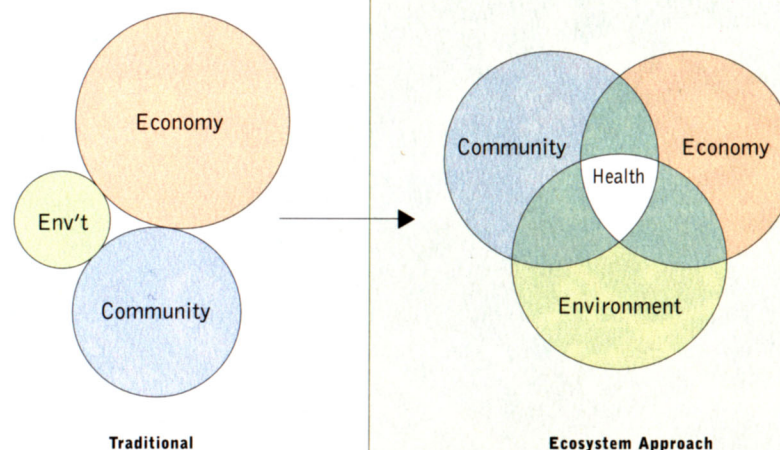
As the urban core becomes revitalized, it will reconnect to the adjacent neighborhoods from which it has been separated. The West Side, Dayton's Bluff, Cathedral Hill, Capitol Hill, Grand Hill, West 7th Street and Irvine Park can be relinked to the downtown waterfront core in a way that strengthens those neighborhoods as well as the downtown itself. While the focus of the Development Framework is a four-square-mile area embracing the downtown core, the Capitol, and the Mississippi River, it proposes a methodology that can be applied throughout the city's neighborhoods.

In his 1995 State of the City address, Mayor Norm Coleman envisioned the riverfront as a stimulus for community development throughout Saint Paul. Mayor Coleman, City agencies and the Saint Paul Riverfront Corporation, with the support of The McKnight Foundation, The Saint Paul Foundation, F.R. Bigelow Foundation, and the Northwest Area Foundation, launched a series of town hall meetings and community gatherings led by the Design Center for American Urban Landscape.

These meetings, coupled with hundreds of other presentations and discussions throughout the community, laid the groundwork for the community's participation in the Development Framework. Additional partners – the Capital City Partnership and the West Side Citizens' Organization – joined the effort to focus on the Development Framework for the urban core, Saint Paul on the Mississippi. The Framework Consulting Team conducted a series of community discussions, individual meetings, and design charrettes. Dominant themes and priorities became evident.

Although there is not complete agreement on all issues, an overarching vision has emerged. There is a continuing and important need for on-going discussions about the Framework and individual projects, but the time for action is now. The next major step will be to reach consensus on implementation. Building capacity, ensuring inter-agency cooperation, adopting supporting public policy, raising financial resources and maintaining community involvement are among the key challenges.

The Framework seeks to create a healthy community by balancing economic, community and environmental imperatives.





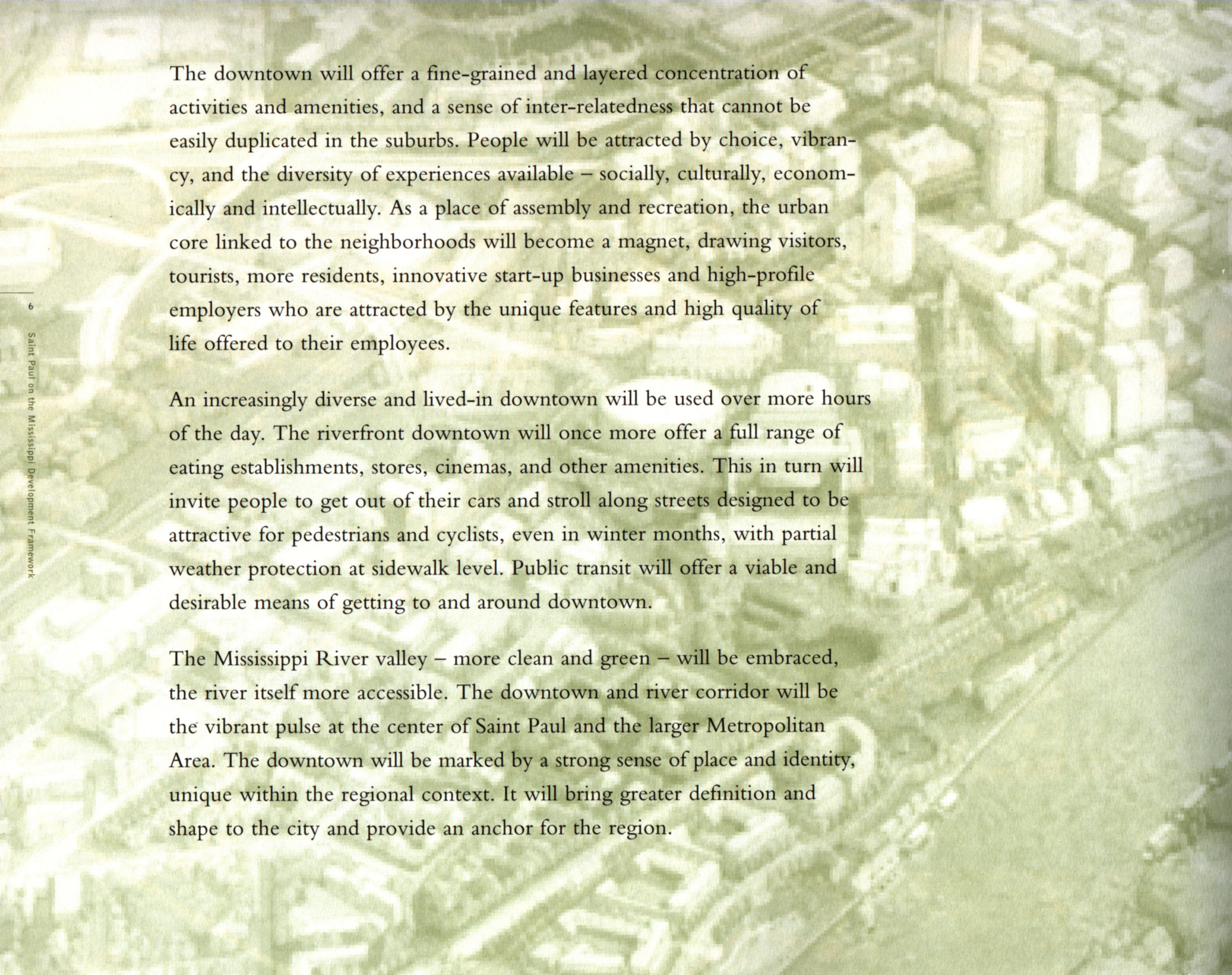
The vision for Saint Paul is of a system of interconnected urban villages nestled in the lush green of a reforested river valley.



The Vision – Capital City on the Mississippi

The Mississippi River flows by 27 miles of Saint Paul, winding through the very heart of the city. Hundreds of millions of dollars have already been spent to clean the water, clear acres of land of obsolete industrial uses, build new infrastructure, and restore the native habitats that once characterized the shoreline. These initiatives attest to the strength of the community's commitment to revitalize the Mississippi riverfront.

The vision for Saint Paul articulated in the Framework is of a system of interconnected urban villages nestled in the lush green of a reforested river valley. People live and work in these villages, each of which is designed around a high-quality public park or other gathering place. Irvine Park, Rice Park and Lowertown are familiar village models. They help to illustrate the vision and lead us to believe that it is within our grasp. Concord Street and Upper Swede Hollow are taking shape. The Upper Landing, Northeast Quadrant and West Side Flats are on the drawing board. The goal of the Framework is to build – and rebuild – the connections between these unique places and re-establish their links to the Mississippi River.

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Saint Paul, Minnesota, showing a dense urban core with numerous tall buildings and a river (the Mississippi River) flowing through it. The image is in a muted, greenish-yellow color palette.

The downtown will offer a fine-grained and layered concentration of activities and amenities, and a sense of inter-relatedness that cannot be easily duplicated in the suburbs. People will be attracted by choice, vibrancy, and the diversity of experiences available – socially, culturally, economically and intellectually. As a place of assembly and recreation, the urban core linked to the neighborhoods will become a magnet, drawing visitors, tourists, more residents, innovative start-up businesses and high-profile employers who are attracted by the unique features and high quality of life offered to their employees.

An increasingly diverse and lived-in downtown will be used over more hours of the day. The riverfront downtown will once more offer a full range of eating establishments, stores, cinemas, and other amenities. This in turn will invite people to get out of their cars and stroll along streets designed to be attractive for pedestrians and cyclists, even in winter months, with partial weather protection at sidewalk level. Public transit will offer a viable and desirable means of getting to and around downtown.

The Mississippi River valley – more clean and green – will be embraced, the river itself more accessible. The downtown and river corridor will be the vibrant pulse at the center of Saint Paul and the larger Metropolitan Area. The downtown will be marked by a strong sense of place and identity, unique within the regional context. It will bring greater definition and shape to the city and provide an anchor for the region.

Although it requires considerable commitment, this is a sustainable vision for Saint Paul. It recognizes the intricate and delicate interdependence of environmental, social and economic issues. It aims in all aspects to create an urban area that is well-integrated with its setting. It leaves intact and reinforces natural and cultural resources for future generations. Its realization requires an effective and comprehensive approach, backed by strategies that address an extremely broad array of issues.

The Capitol-Mississippi “Crescent” emerges as a highly focused band of opportunity – building on initiatives already underway from the Capitol, along Wabasha and St. Peter Streets, splaying out through Rice Park to the downtown high bluff, the Upper Landing and Harriet Island Park. Realizing the early vision of the renowned architect Cass Gilbert will make a significant contribution to forging a strong link between the Capitol, the downtown and the river.

Portions of the Mississippi River valley are already reclaimed.



Ten principles that underpin the Framework

Promoting a more holistic approach to city building, the Development Framework reflects a fundamental shift in thinking, represented in the Ten Principles summarized below.

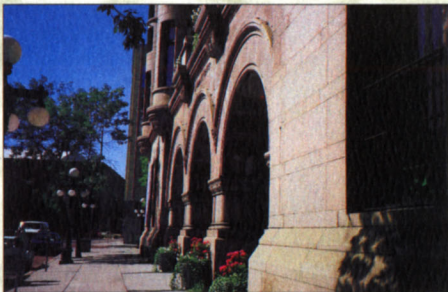
1. Evoke a sense of place.

Saint Paul has a unique natural setting. The Mississippi River, the bluff formation, the Phalen Creek-Trout Brook reach and remnants of the prairie landscape contribute to defining the city's character and sense of place. Saint Paul is also distinguished by a number of outstanding parks, buildings of architectural and historic importance, as well as important natural features. The key is to use Saint Paul's unique physical qualities – natural setting, parks, and buildings – to strategically enhance them and improve relationships between them.

Key recommendations:

- Identify key aspects of the natural setting that contribute to defining the character of Saint Paul, including the bluff, river, undulating topography and the native prairie landscapes; incorporate these features into new development opportunities.
- Create a unique urban setting on the Mississippi River by investing in Lowertown, the Lower Landing and the Capitol-Mississippi Crescent (including Wabasha Corridor, Rice Park-Civic Center, Upper Landing and the West Side) and Harriet Island Park.
- Create a community of urban villages, each focused on a high-quality public space, that invites residents, workers and visitors, to live, walk, shop, recreate, meet and experience the city.

Historic structures, such as the Landmark Center, contribute to the sense of place.



2. Restore and establish the unique urban ecology.

Generally speaking, since the industrial era, natural systems in urban areas have given way to the demands of development and industry. In light of the diminishing transportation/industrial role of the river valley, an unprecedented opportunity exists to re-establish a balance between urban and natural systems and to create a unique urban ecology in Saint Paul, embracing natural features and providing a context for initiatives to restore contaminated lands and waters.

Key recommendations:

- Approach development decisions with a view to establishing a balance between built and natural areas.
- Create an urban forest by extending the tree canopy found on the bluff tops and in surrounding neighborhoods into the urban core.
 - Build on the work of Greening the Great River Park to create a dense green armature embracing downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods, comprised of the Mississippi River corridor, the Phalen Creek-Trout Brook Reach, and the bluffs.
 - Establish a greener downtown by landscaping major streets and open spaces throughout the urban core.
- Identify appropriate opportunities for restoring native habitats.
- Improve the quality of the Mississippi River by utilizing stormwater management that makes use of biological systems within the open space network.
- Balance the competing demands for use of the Mississippi River and its banks, including barging and recreational use, and opportunities for naturalization and restoration.
- Develop strategies to restore, manage and/or contain existing contaminated soils, particularly along the river, as part of a broader strategy of re-populating the riverfront and re-urbanizing vacant lands.
- Establish stewardship programs that engage the community.

The tree canopy found on bluff tops and in surrounding neighborhoods should be extended into the downtown to create an urban forest.



3. Invest in the public realm.

Streets, sidewalks, parks, and ravine edges support the public life of the city and contribute to a sense of community. Deliberately designed as a network, these spaces encourage pedestrian activity and form important connecting routes within the downtown. A successful and vibrant public realm fosters a sense of security and attracts private investment.

Streets:

For the last several decades, streets have been viewed primarily in terms of their traffic capacity. Their potential to play an important role as pedestrian spaces has been underplayed. Resources that could have gone into improved streets have been put into skyways physically removed from the street level. Similarly, building design has frequently missed opportunities to contribute to framing and enhancing street-level spaces. A full range of urban design strategies is required to form successful streets.

Key recommendations:

- Shift the approach to streets from one that focuses primarily on traffic capacity to one that gives equal consideration to the intensity of pedestrian activity and quality of public space.
- Design streets to be attractive and inviting elements of the urban landscape through streetscape initiatives, the orientation and detailing of buildings, and judicious use of traffic calming techniques.
- Encourage pedestrian use of streets by limiting further expansion of the skyway network, creating more vertical connections between the skyway and street levels, and developing more weather protection at the street level.

Parks and Open Spaces:

Saint Paul has a rich tradition of parks and urban squares including Mears Park, Rice Park, Irvine Park and Capital Centre Plaza. The challenge is to build upon and expand this network, integrating new elements into the urban fabric. The Mississippi River and its edges, the reaches and bluff tops, are also critical elements of the public realm that should be made more accessible and inviting.

Key recommendations:

- Increase the diversity of parks and open spaces to support a range of recreational opportunities and community events.
- Design and program existing open spaces to encourage greater use, including the Capitol Mall and Capital Centre Plaza.
- Improve access to natural features, such as the Mississippi River, the bluffs and the reaches, through trails, stairs, view corridors, and extensions of streets.
- Where appropriate, locate a green “commons” at the heart of urban villages.

Investment in the public realm, particularly streets, encourages pedestrian activity.



4. Broaden the mix of uses.

A greater mix of uses creates a more vibrant urban core by encouraging people to live, work and walk downtown and by fostering synergy between activities. While there are already people living in the core, they are in a few isolated pockets and, as a result, their presence is scarcely felt. Commercial and office functions continue to dominate the downtown. Through an incremental process, the re-emergence of a downtown community can be accelerated. A defined series of “urban village” settings will create the opportunity to develop new market niches in an already diversifying urban economy.

Key recommendations:

- Create a series of mixed-use urban villages throughout the downtown and West Side that build on the precedents established by Lowertown and Rice Park and support a diversity of housing, employment, recreation and supporting amenities.
- Complement urban villages with intensified mixed-use corridors along Wabasha (from Concord to the Capitol Mall), both banks of the Mississippi River, and West 7th Street.
- Increase the range of housing available downtown through strategic redevelopment of sites, such as the Lowry Hotel, 7th Place Residences, and Schubert Apartments.

A series of linked, mixed use “urban villages” supports the re-emergence of a downtown community.



5. Improve connectivity.

Saint Paul is marked by an impressive legacy of built form and open spaces. While many elements are individually successful, such as Rice and Mears Parks, they are generally disconnected from each other. In some places, the dramatic changes in topography create barriers to movement, for example, between the bluff top and the river flats. At a larger scale, the downtown as a whole is effectively isolated from the surrounding city by the massive “canyons” of the interstate network.

The impact and role of individual built and natural elements, and indeed of the whole downtown, could be greatly enhanced if they were connected to and part of a larger network. There is an opportunity to identify and provide the critical linking elements, taking advantage of a wide range of options for improved visual and physical connections at the local, city and regional scale.

Key recommendations:

- Create links between the downtown and regional trails such as the Grand Round-Chain of Lakes in Minneapolis, the Dakota Country Trail System and the Gateway Trail to Duluth.
- Increase access to the river, the bluffs and the reaches by creating connected pedestrian and/or bicycle trails along them.
- Develop stairs, ramps, and elevators at key locations to navigate the change in grade from the bluff tops to the river flats and reaches.
- Improve connections between parks in the downtown by greening linking streets and creating a more inviting pedestrian environment.
- Preserve view corridors that establish connections to key natural features, landmark structures and neighborhoods.



Connections exist at many scales. In contrast to the History Center (below), the siting of buildings and alignment of streets powerfully connects the Rice Park precinct to the surrounding city (above).



6. Ensure that buildings support broader city-building goals.

There are many examples of distinguished architecture from various periods within downtown Saint Paul that respond to the context and contribute successfully to the public realm by framing and directly addressing streets and open spaces. The Hamm Building is an excellent example. However, some recent buildings in Saint Paul have tended to be more insular and self-absorbed, thereby overlooking key opportunities to contribute to broader city-building objectives. The challenge is to rigorously identify and promote elements of building design that contribute to building a vibrant city and streetscape.

Key recommendations:

- Ensure that new and renovated buildings contribute to the public realm by addressing and framing streets as well as open spaces, and by locating active uses on the ground floor.
- Encourage a diversity of mixed-use buildings appropriate to the distinct character of each area in the downtown.
- Discourage superbblock, mega-structures that create barriers within the urban fabric.
- Ensure that the scale of buildings does not overwhelm natural features.
- Discourage large, high-rise structures that absorb inordinately large increments of development vertically into one location and prevent a greater distribution of much-needed investment.
- Encourage parking structures that are less obtrusive, including underground parking and mixed-use parking ramps designed as urban buildings with active, street-oriented uses on the ground floor.

7. Build on existing strengths.

The positive impact of downtown success stories – parks, buildings, streets – can be increased by strategically extending them and replicating their positive attributes. Rice Park and Lowertown are prime examples of successful urban areas. Greater benefit can also be attained from investment dollars by targeting areas where there are already initiatives underway. The key is to nurture and expand upon successes and to strategically consolidate initiatives throughout the downtown.

Key recommendations:

- Extend successful urban areas. For example, extend Irvine Park into the Upper Landing, Lowertown into the Northeast Quadrant and to the river, and the West Side neighborhood to the river. Expand the positive character of Rice Park to create a regional destination that embraces the Science Museum of Minnesota, the Civic Center and other cultural draws.
- Identify and build incrementally and strategically on areas where there are initiatives already underway, such as in Lowertown and the Capitol-Mississippi Crescent.

The highly successful Mears Park creates a focus for Lowertown.



Historic resources include buildings such as the Saint Paul Hotel, terminating the axis of 5th Street.



8. Preserve and enhance heritage resources.

Saint Paul has a rich legacy of historic resources – buildings, landscapes, and monuments as well as distinctive geological and topographic features. These resources define a sense of place that is rooted in local history. The challenge is to recognize the diverse range of such resources within Saint Paul, to preserve them, and, where possible, to creatively adapt them for new uses and expanded significance.

Key recommendations:

- The Historic Sites Survey undertaken by the Heritage Preservation Commission and Ramsey County Historical Society should be supplemented to include all historic buildings, structures, landscapes, monuments and geological features within the downtown and river corridor, especially in the Seven Corners area and along West 7th Street (overlooked in the 1983 survey).
- Promote the designation of Heritage Preservation Districts in addition to individual buildings. For example, consideration should be given to designating the Rice Park area as a Heritage Preservation District.
- Renovation and adaptive re-use should be made a priority for key heritage elements.

9. Provide a balanced network for movement.

A balanced network for movement supports travel by car, public transportation, bicycle and foot. It means that street rights-of-way are designed to be shared, attractive and safe for all these modes of movement. In Saint Paul, the dominant form of transportation is the automobile. Public transit is not an attractive or viable alternative for many trips. Similarly the environment is not conducive to bicycling and walking in many parts of the downtown. The key is to employ a diversity of strategies to create a more balanced system of movement, an objective that is closely linked to the overall quality of the public realm.

Key recommendations:

- Improve the quality of the pedestrian environment by acknowledging that streets are a major element in the public realm and designing them appropriately.
- Create new forms of weather-protected pedestrian walkways at-grade, comprised of arcades along building edges, through-block connections and free-standing shelters.
- Facilitate bicycle movement by connecting to regional greenway corridors and designating bicycle lanes on selected streets.
- Create a local transit system that facilitates movement within the downtown and links the urban villages.
- Establish a street hierarchy that meets the needs of a more pedestrian-friendly downtown and is based on a range of characteristics, including intensity of adjacent uses, greening and vehicular capacity.
- Re-introduce two-way streets through phased initiatives, beginning with Wabasha and St. Peter Streets.
- Improve the management of existing parking; judiciously expand the range of new parking.
- Maximize the use of on-street parking.

A balanced network for movement encourages travel by car, transit, bicycle and on foot.



10. Foster public safety.

The sense of safety is greatest when there is a vibrant downtown – when streets, parks and public spaces are active for longer hours of the day, when there is a continuous urban fabric, and when active uses provide an informal means of surveillance.

During the day, downtown workers contribute to a system of informal surveillance that helps to make the streets feel safe. As the streets empty out at night and there are fewer “eyes on the street,” the sense of security is diminished. Many buildings in Saint Paul locate inactive and blind uses on the ground floor, creating a dead zone and removing an important source of casual surveillance. The large number of vacant lots, particularly on the downtown periphery, also diminishes the sense of security.

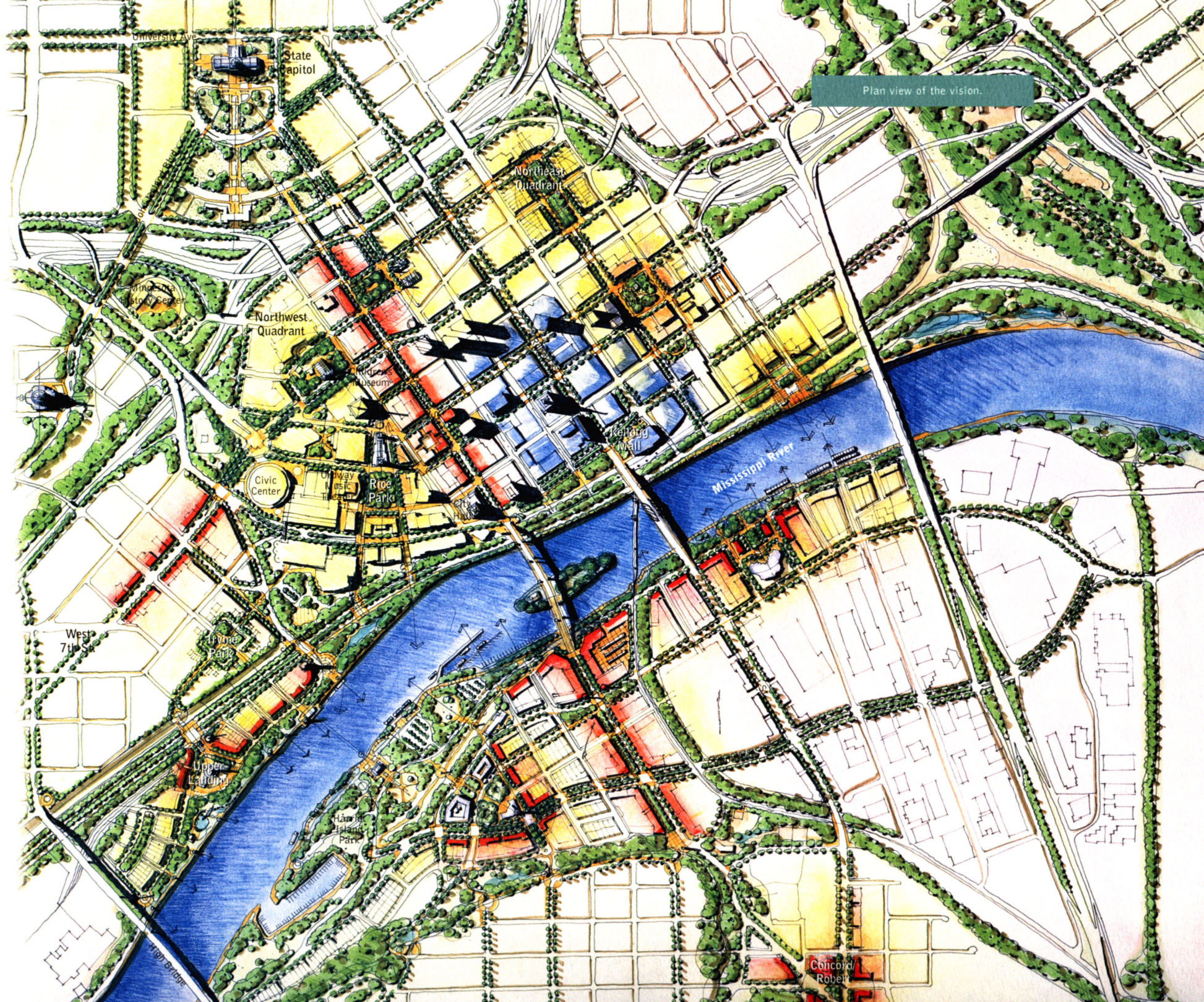
The key is to implement the broad range of strategies identified in the Framework to revitalize and re-populate the downtown, and create a vibrant and healthy urban environment.

Key recommendations:

- Encourage people to live in the downtown by supporting the development of urban villages and a diversity of housing opportunities.
- Encourage activities, particularly at the street level, that keep the downtown vibrant at night, such as after-theater dining.
- Direct infill projects to strategic vacant parcels.
- Lower the concentration of social agencies and problem uses in the downtown core.
- Work with developers, designers, and building/lot owners to implement the “Design for Public Safety Saint Paul” initiative.

A vibrant downtown creates a safer environment for even the most vulnerable members of society.





Plan view of the vision.

University Ave

State Capitol

Northeast Quadrant

Northwest Quadrant

World Center

Widener Museum

Civic Center

Ortwey Music Theater

Rice Park

Kennerly Mall

Mississippi River

West 7th St

Trinity Park

Upper Landing

Hawthorne Island Park

Colcord Robert